Introduction to Ethnic Theatre in the United States

Ethnic Theatre was a reflection, or for better terms representation of the minority communities, since it was by minorities for minorities. It allowed many groups to display a voice or narrative that was hardly seen or cared for by the majority. Many stories that were told by these groups of people were often tales of struggle or sometimes comedy, which often tied racial issues along the narrative.

Against most beliefs, Ethnic Theatre was done by many intelligent, educated groups of people, created to entertain and provide an outlet for their cultural groups. Ethnic Theatre was something minorities could have for themselves, even if the maximum profit would not be gained from such a narrowed target of an audiences, that was usually poor. It allowed for a display of traditions and culture, as a way of pride, and to also remember their way of life, which is often hard; many minority groups go through loss of culture as they either adapt and/or stripped of their own heritage. Ethnic Theatre allowed groups of minorities a form of entertainment that didn’t include laughing at themselves, at least not through the White Man’s narrative. It provided a social hub, a stress reliever, and something to ease the burden upon their daily lives, especially during the great depression.

However, even though Ethnic Theatre was a great entertainment and past time to many communities, their shows had a major decline over the years, mainly between 1930s-1960s due to the market crashing and lack of actors during World War II. Producing plays became extremely difficult to afford since it was very costly and required a budget many Theatre houses couldnt afford. However, when the Civil Rights Movement occurred, there was a surge of Ethnic plays, mainly African American produce, reflecting the strength that was growing within the community. The reemergence of Ethnic Theatres continued to progress, and still survives today, especially with the help of government support, programs and funding.